PHARAOH SHOSHENQ'S CAMPAIGN TO PALESTINE

by

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The Libyan chieftain Shoshenq (biblical Shishaq or Shushaq), founder of the 22nd Dynasty (the Bubastite Dynasty), was determined to rebuild Egypt's power in former domains, including Palestine. He began his political plan by regaining control over Upper Egypt. He did this by ending the independent Theban dynasty of army commanders who had served as hereditary priests of Amon, substituting family members in their place and appointing loyal northerners in the Theban administration. He then turned his attention further afield. He renewed ties with Byblos and tried to reconquer Nubia after it had experienced one and a half centuries of independence. After these goals were met he was in a position to turn his attention to the former Egyptian dominion of Palestine. The dissolution of the union between Israel and Judah left this territory divided into a number of small political units, providing Shoshenq with a good opportunity to renew Egypt's power in southwestern Asia. An inscription from the temple of Amon at Karnak

* G.W. Ahlström died on January 17, 1992. He had completed a first draft of the present article before his death, which was edited and revised slightly for posthumous publication by his former student, Diana Edelman. To orient the reader unfamiliar with the subject, she has added a fuller description of the location and layout of the actual inscription from Karnak, as well as the section summarizing past reconstructions of Shoshenq's campaign route. She has also expanded the bibliography in a few of the notes, knowing that Prof. Ahlström would have supplemented his initial citations himself before final publication.


3 Kitchen thinks it probable that Shoshenq campaigned in Nubia ([n.1], p. 293).
indicates that he undertook a military campaign to accomplish this goal in the twenty-first year of his reign. This paper will explore his specific objectives in that campaign and try to reconstruct the route he undertook.

The biblical testimony

The Bible provides a brief mention of Shoshenq’s campaign to Palestine in 1 Kgs. xiv 25–28. It reports that in the fifth year of Rehoboam, Shishaq of Egypt went up against Jerusalem and took away the treasures of the king’s house and the shields of gold that Solomon had made—everything. From the biblical perspective, Shishaq’s main objective seems to have been Jerusalem. However, we must remember that this account reflects the limited interests of the Judahite historiographer and so may not accurately represent the Egyptian objectives.

The Chronicler’s statement about the campaign in 2 Chr. xii 1–12 can be seen to be an exaggerated expansion of the account in 1 Kgs. xiv 25–28. The report that Shishaq’s troops included 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen⁴ and allies without number from the Libyans, Sukkiyim (Libyan Tjukten) and Ethiopians (Nubians) is done for rhetorical effect to emphasize the large size of God’s punishing enemy force. The reference to Shishaq’s capture of fortified cities in addition to Jerusalem, a detail not found in Kings, is the invention of the Chronicler, who wanted to have Shishaq inflict an even greater punishment on the sinful king. The Chronicler provides as the specific reason for Shishaq’s success Rehoboam’s abandonment of Yahweh (vv. 1, 5, 8). His account is merely a pious embellishment of the information about Shishaq’s campaign found in 1 Kgs. xiv 25.

The Egyptian testimony

An inscription detailing Shoshenq’s campaign was engraved in the Amon temple complex at Karnak, on the SW hypostyle wall near

⁴ Kitchen suggests that the 60,000 horsemen may have been six divisions ([n.1], p. 295, n. 289). S. Herrmann argues that Shoshenq’s army could not have been greater than the one fielded by Ramses II (‘‘Operation Pharaos Schoschenks I, im östlichen Ephraim’’, ZDPV 80 [1964], p. 72). The truth is that we cannot be certain.